Young Adult Experience on Sabbath School Engagement.

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Rationale and Purpose

Purpose:
- To understand youth and young adult experiences of Sabbath School, and to determine the strengths and limitations of this program as it pertains to youth and young adult engagement in planned programs.

Rationale:
- Sabbath School has been an established program for spiritual growth, faith development and relationship building for congregation of the Adventist Church.
- North American Division reports that young adults have disengaged from Sabbath School, and youth and young adult engagement in Sabbath School has declined.
- Young adults question whether Sabbath School is another redundant activity that neither youth and young people engage with.
- Faith and spirituality are important features of young adulthood, yet there is a decline in youth and young adult engagement Sabbath School North American Division.
- A recent survey conducted on the campus of Andrews University gave insight from youth and young adults about their Sabbath School experience.
- The results highlighted factors that challenge their personal and spiritual growth in the SDA Church, which sometimes conflict with their personal values, stage of faith development, and the relevance of Sabbath School in the lives of young adults.

Weakness- Sabbath School

- 224 respondents completed the online survey, of which 93% were young adults aged 18-35 years, and 7% were youth.
- 23% did not attend in the last 6 months.
- 55% of respondents stated that they do not attend Sabbath School because they are too tired.
- 55% state that Sabbath morning’s no longer work for them.
- 37% reported a lack of stimulation.
- 37% are no longer interested.
- 29% stated that the topics do not help them grow spiritually.
- 25% stated that Sabbath School lesson do not help me to think critically about my faith and SDA theology.
- 16% reported that Sabbath School lesson is too structured.

Strengths- Sabbath School

- 73% attended Sabbath School in the last 6 months.
- 43% attended each week; 18% attending twice a month; 11% once a per month.
- 31% say that Sabbath School addresses their need for prayer.
- 51% have a quarterly.
- 46% Sabbath School helps them to grow in their relationship with God.

Structure and Format

Youth and Young adults expressed a need to consider the delivery, structure, format and the environment where Sabbath School is delivered.
- Teaching people HOW to study the Bible for themselves and HOW to pray themselves. Avoid the tendency to spoon feed.
- Acknowledge visitors and engage them in discussion.
- Be more mission minded and Sabbath School is often a lecture, rather than facilitation sessions.

Teaching and Facilitation

- Instructors need to talk less and let student engage more.
- More relational dynamic instead of the teacher/facilitator.
- Use more visual aids; classrooms instead of the sanctuary.

Alternative Sabbath School Activities

- Pray in the Park
- Bible stories
- Sabbath School on the go
- Small groups
- Small group discussions
- Mission
- Crafts
- Bird watching
- Walks with a Christian
- Coffee Shop Ministry
- Mentorships

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Relationships Matter

Youth and young adults report that Sabbath School has always been an opportunity to connect with friends, however some participants report that ways to increase engagement would be to consider:
- Shorter lesson, with more time for bonding and relationship building.
- Small group discussions and prayer times are extremely powerful.
- Have a more realistic, practical approach to life.
- Find ways to accept that people are people as they are.
- Focus on the things that really matter in the lives of youth and young adults.
- Provide more outreach opportunities for each class on Sabbath afternoons.
- Always acknowledge visitors.

Limitations of the Study

- Convenient sample.
- Young adult age range is too broad to determine the specific age related level of engagement, and their lived experience.
- 49 respondents of this sample have disengaged from Sabbath School.
- Youth and Young Adults on college campus does not provide a true picture of what Sabbath School engagement is like at local church level.
- 42% of respondents were from Michigan Conference; 36%- Other, 8%- Lake Region Conference.

Recommendations

- Conduct an indepth study of Young Adult engagement in Sabbath School across the North American Division.
- Determine the true relevancy of current Sabbath School Model and resources for young and emerging adults.
- Create a Young Adult Sabbath School resource, specifically tailored for those aged 25 and over.
- Identify interactive resources for Sabbath School.
- More interactive bible study.
- More creative methods for delivery.

Faith and Spirituality

- Young adults want a Christianity that is genuinely transformative, not necessarily new, creative, or innovative.
- Expand the opportunity for college students to learn more about the Bible, “I just want to learn more about my faith through the Bible”.
- We need reformation and unification of the people, to bring about an outpouring of the Holy Spirit.
- I would like to see more of an emphasis on the simplicity and practicality of the Bible and how to share this with others.

Relevancy

- A clear vision and a goal in mind. More mission minded!
- Have Sabbath School outside the walls of the church.
- More authenticity, interaction and participation. Being real, and relevant to people.